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ABSTRACT

The Health Academy and the Media Academy, two innovative high school intervention programs for at-risk youth in Oakland (California), are examined. A collaborative effort of the school district, business, and community, the academies are school-within-a-school programs that engage about 120 at-risk students each in specific academic curricula for 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students offering smaller classes and increased personal attention. Ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews, are used to examine the impact of the program on students in terms of their improved attitudes toward school, academic performance, social bonding, and future orientation. Findings show that not only did the academies teach the students specific academic skills for college entrance, but they also helped to improve the students' attitudes and self-esteem. Virtually every student interviewed had college plans, and 14% of academy students took the Scholastic Aptitude Test more than once. These outcomes can be attributed to smaller classes and block-scheduling, which helped to develop close bonds and friendship among the students and their teachers. In addition, the academy curriculum, by virtue of its pertinence to the outside world and the interesting manner in which it was presented, maintained and increased students' interest in school. Statistical data are presented in one table. A 22-item list of references is included. (Author/JB)

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PROVIDING OPTIONS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH:

THE HEALTH AND MEDIA ACADEMIES IN OAKLAND

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Running Head: PROVIDING OPTIONS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

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Abstract

This paper examines the Health Academy and the Media Academy, two innovative high school intervention programs for at-risk youth in Oakland, California. A collaborative effort of the school, district, business, and community, the academies are school-within-a-school programs which engage at-risk students in a specific academic curriculum over three years. Students enjoy smaller classes and increased personal attention in a decentralized setting while preparing for postsecondary education or skilled entry-level employment. The paper examines the impact of the program on students in terms of their improved attitudes toward school, academic performance, social bonding, and future orientation. Ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews, were used to conduct the research. Findings show that not only did the academies teach the students specific academic skills necessary for college entrance, but they also helped to improve the students' attitudes and self-esteem. These outcomes can be attributed to several features of the academies' design and organization. Smaller classes and block-scheduling helped to develop close bonds and friendship among the students and their teachers. The academy curriculum, by virtue of its pertinence to the outside world and the interesting manner in which it was presented, maintained and increased students' interest in school. The paper validates program effectiveness and should help educators interested in the academy model begin to replicate the program.

PROVIDING OPTIONS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH:
THE HEALTH AND MEDIA ACADEMIES IN OAKLAND

Final Report

Introduction

School dropouts, low academic achievement, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy continue to plague American education. In many American high schools, a demoralized staff, poor teaching, compromised standards, and a haphazard curriculum are the norm (Cusick, 1983; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986). These problems are often most acute in the inner-city; and Oakland, California is no exception.

Oakland Unified School District has been overwhelmed with problems for the past few years. In addition to high dropout rates and test scores that are among the lowest in the state, the district has also had to contend with "cronyism, incompetence, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement" (Maynard, 1989). The district is near bankruptcy, and thus far, eight employees or officials have been charged with crimes ranging from forgery to grand theft and embezzlement (Grabowicz & Frost, 1989). As a result, the state education department has imposed a trustee on the district (Mathis, 1989).

In the midst of the turmoil, two high schools in Oakland have continued to search for solutions. Unwilling to give up on their students, they have been experimenting with ways to reorganize the high school experience for inner-city youth so that the number who graduate, get good jobs, or enroll in college will increase. One approach has been to set up school-based "Academies," the Health Academy at Oakland Technical High School and the Media Academy at John C. Fremont High School.

Based upon a concept originated in Philadelphia and successfully replicated elsewhere, the schools provide students with an academic curriculum focused on a vocational area in a school-within-a-school setting (Academy for Educational

Development, 1989; American Institutes for Research, 1984; Snyder & McMullan, 1987; Stern, Dayton, Paik, Weisberg, & Evans, 1988). The Health Academy prepares students for postsecondary study in health professions; the Media Academy gives students experience and training in both print and electronic media.

The Health Academy, established in 1985, graduated its first cohort of students in 1988; the Media Academy, begun a year later, graduated its first group in 1989. While these programs are relatively new, they both show great potential and already have evidence of success.

Originally conceived as a vocational program, earlier versions of the Philadelphia academy approach provided potential dropouts with experience and training in the electrical, business and commerce, and health areas. They utilized a school-within-a-school organization with cohorts of about 50 at-risk students per year enrolled in a specialized and highly relevant curriculum. Work experience and field trips were integral to the program, and business and the community were involved in its management (Snyder & McMullan, 1987). In replicating these programs, the Oakland schools maintained most of these features, but shifted the focus of the intervention away from entry-level jobs and toward preparation for postsecondary education.

For the past two years, staff from Far West Laboratory have observed classes, interviewed teachers and students, and talked with other people involved with the programs. L. F. Guthrie and G. P. Guthrie (1989) compared the two Academies and described the various components. This paper presents further analysis and, in particular, reports findings from extensive semi-structured interviews with the students.

A Theory of Dropout Prevention

Our research has been guided by a theory of dropout prevention developed by Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989). The theory is based on the

concepts of **school membership** and **educational engagement**. Students develop school membership through their social integration and bonding with peers and adults. Through their formal and informal participation in school activities, students become attached to the school and committed to its programs; they come to see a purpose for schooling.

Educational engagement refers to students' involvement in the formal work that teachers and the curriculum prescribe. More than mere motivation, engagement encompasses the student's interest in learning and in school tasks. Before they can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills, students must first become engaged in their schooling. To do this, schoolwork needs to be intrinsically interesting or related to the real world, and instruction needs to go beyond the superficial coverage common in many schools.

Successful dropout prevention thus includes both the social and academic elements of schooling. In essence, schools must provide a community of support for the students so that they develop a sense of **school membership** (social bonding) first and then a habit of **educational engagement** (involvement). In our study, we set out to examine the extent to which the two Oakland Academies successfully incorporate these two key concepts in their design and implementation.

Methods

Ethnographic methods (G. P. Guthrie, 1985) were used to document and understand the operation of the Academies fully. During the 1987-88 school year, our research team observed a variety of classes and other Academy activities, such as field trips. Seven formal site visits were conducted at the Health Academy and ten at the Media Academy. At the Health Academy, we were able to observe chemistry, computer lab, health occupations, biology, physiology, English, and math classes; at the Media Academy, journalism, English, social studies, and production classes were observed. A few Academy and non-Academy classes, taught by the same teachers,

were also observed and compared. During all these visits, we were able to speak informally with teachers and students in a variety of settings. The site visits enabled us to note student behavior, attitudes, and levels of interest. Over the 1988-89 school year, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, teachers, school administrators, and advisors in both school and non-school settings. We also attended special functions, went along on field trips, and served on the district's "Super Advisory Committee" on Academies.

Furthermore, in order to fully assess the impact of the Academies and gather more in-depth data on student changes in attitudes, achievement, and future orientation, all Academy seniors were interviewed a few weeks before graduation. These interviews provided a three-year perspective on students' Academy experiences. The interviews included 20 sets of questions divided into five categories: student background, experience in the Academy program, friendship patterns, prior school experiences, and future plans. Sixteen Health Academy students and 28 Media Academy students were interviewed in May and June of 1989.

Finally, student transcripts were reviewed in order to gather data on grades, Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills scores, and Scholastic Aptitude Test scores. The transcripts also showed where students went if they left school before graduating (e.g., dropped out, transferred, or left temporarily).

The Oakland Academies

The Health Academy

The choice of "health" as a focus for the district's first Academy was a logical one, since the health industry is the largest employer in Oakland; and Oakland Technical High School is within walking distance of "Pill Hill," the site of several hospitals and health care facilities. In addition, the area surrounding Oakland enjoys a steady growth in the health-related biotechnology industry.

Situated only a few blocks from downtown, Oakland Technical High School faces a busy thoroughfare. The school enrolls approximately 1,800 students, 94 percent of whom are minorities (73 percent Blacks, 17 percent Asian and Pacific Islanders, three percent Hispanics, and one percent Filipinos). Over one third of the students qualify for AFDC assistance.

The Health Academy involves nine teachers under the leadership of Patricia Clark and serves approximately 120 students in grades 10, 11, and 12. Each year, students are block-programmed into Academy courses in science, English, and math, that cover the same curricular objectives as others in the school, but emphasize medical or health issues whenever possible. The core of the curriculum is the science sequence of biology, physiology, and chemistry. Each course has an accompanying lab, usually scheduled the next period. More advanced students may take chemistry in their junior year and then enroll in physics as seniors. Others can take an Advanced Health Occupations course as seniors that covers the basic skills and medical terminology required for hospital technicians, clerical workers, and nurses' aides. In the second semester, these students are provided work experience at a local hospital, rotating through 12 different departments a week at a time.

In Academy English, students read novels and stories that have a health/biological orientation. A library adjacent to the Academy's main classroom contains multiple copies of health- and medicine-related novels, as well as a collection of popular non-fiction books on relevant topics.

Local businesses and the community are involved in several ways. Students take frequent field trips to the nearby hospitals, work at part-time and/or summer jobs, and participate in seminars at the Samuel Merritt College of Nursing (for a detailed description of the Health Academy, see L. F. Guthrie & Long, 1989).

The Media Academy

The Media Academy was begun a year later as part of the effort of the Oakland Unified School District to extend the Academy model to three other high schools. The district's three Academies offer concentrations in media, business and finance, and computer technology. The Media Academy, built on the productive journalism program at Fremont High School, is directed by Steve O'Donoghue. Since most journalism or broadcasting jobs today require a college degree, the Media Academy is designed as essentially an academic preparation program.

The Media Academy represents a new direction for the Academy model, a direction that holds considerable promise. It offers students the opportunity to practice journalism as part of their school experience. O'Donoghue's students not only publish the school paper, but put out a bilingual community paper, El Tigre, as well. In 1988-89, the electronic media portion of the curriculum was added to the Academy, and students produced an AIDS education video with the support of the local YMCA.

John C. Fremont High School is located in a low-income area of southeast Oakland. The school enrolls about 1,700 students, of whom 98 percent are minorities (54 percent Blacks, 32 percent Hispanics, eight percent Asian and Pacific Islanders, three percent Filipinos, and one percent Native Americans). The Media Academy occupies two portables near the back entrance of the school; one of these serves as the Academy office and O'Donoghue's classroom. The school newspaper, the Green and Gold, is produced in the Academy office, which is also home for several computers, a typesetting machine, a new digital scanner, and a darkroom.

The second portable serves as the classroom of English teacher Michael Jackson, who works closely with O'Donoghue. The proximity of these buildings makes block-scheduling of students and coordination between the two teachers easy to manage. The new instructor for video production is another key staff member.

Two social studies teachers and a librarian are also involved in the program, but because of their commitments to other school activities, they participate less actively.

The Media Academy serves approximately 120 students in three grade levels. Students are block-scheduled in English and journalism classes in the morning and move through the rest of the school day as a cohort. The Media Academy curriculum is designed to help students develop and apply reading, writing, critical thinking, and technical skills through the hands-on production of school newspapers, magazines, and radio and television projects.

Currently, the Media Academy Advisory Panel includes the editor and president of the Oakland Tribune, local radio and television personalities, and communications faculty from the University of California, Berkeley and San Francisco State University. This group provides guidance and publicity for the Academy and offers occasional lectures. Several corporations also contribute time and equipment to the Academy. (For a more detailed description of the program, see L. F. Guthrie & G. P. Guthrie, 1989; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

Academy Students

The students selected for the Academies were at risk of dropping out of school. They had average-to-low grades, but were judged to have the potential to succeed. While school staff described some of them as "average" in achievement, at these two schools, "average" often meant students who were three or more years behind grade level. Within the Academy were students who had a record of poor attendance, disruptive behavior, or involvement with drugs. Moreover, many Academy students had backgrounds and experiences common to inner-city life. They came from single-parent homes and encountered crime, drugs, and prostitution daily. The school principal said that the Health Academy students were some of the "hardest core" in the school.

The ethnic composition of the Academies reflected the enrollment of the respective schools. The Health Academy seniors were 88 percent Black, seven percent Asian, and six percent White. At the Media Academy, the distribution was 57 percent Black, 36 percent Hispanic, and seven percent Asian. Of the Media Academy seniors, 40 percent said they spoke a language other than English at home.

Many of the students in the Academies came from disadvantaged homes. Nearly 90 percent of those interviewed lived in the lower-income neighborhoods around the schools. Less than one-third (31 percent) of the Health Academy students and slightly more than half (54 percent) of those from the Media Academy lived with both parents. Most of the others said they lived with their mothers (43 percent). About half the students interviewed said that at least one adult they lived with had completed college or trade school.

In general, however, students did not seem to be comfortable discussing their families. When asked whether their parents supported their studies in the Academies, most students (81 percent) said that their parents were supportive but were not actively involved. More information on the students is presented in the following section.

Findings

The focus of this paper is on the experiences and outcomes for students with three years in the Health and Media Academies. Findings are based upon interviews with school staff and graduating seniors (one cohort from each academy), observations, transcripts (one cohort from the Media Academy; two cohorts from the Health Academy), and other existing student outcome data. The discussion covers four areas: attitudes toward school, academic performance, social bonding, and future orientation.

Attitudes Toward School

Many of the students recruited for the Academies had a history of poor attendance and disruptive behavior, were disaffected with school, and were at risk of dropping out. The Academy experience, however, appeared to have had a dramatic effect on how they thought about school and academic work. Although bored and uninterested in school before, after three years in the Academy, more than three-quarters of those interviewed reported having developed a more positive attitude toward school. Several even described themselves as "driven," "motivated," and "ambitious." In retrospect, they seemed to agree that the Academy experience had helped them focus themselves and their goals.

Academy students' improved attitudes were revealed in their study habits and classroom behavior. They were less disruptive in class and able to work in cooperative groups. One of the English teachers noticed a definite change from their sophomore to senior years. At first, "they kept bouncing off the walls, and I kept wondering how [the director] had gotten them together at all. By the time they were seniors, they were a sharp class." Another teacher observed that "you could pick them out all over the campus--they're a little better mannered."

While some of their improved behavior might be attributed to their having grown older, comparisons with non-Academy students suggested further evidence of the program's effect. One teacher, for example, described the Health Academy students as "more serious" and "more productive" than their non-Academy peers. "They don't complain about the difficulty of assignments," she said. The physiology teacher in the Health Academy noticed a "different attitude toward school--more like that of the top academic kids in other classes." They "really want to know things" and "show genuine interest," he added.

Another aspect of their improved attitudes was revealed in the feeling of ownership students had for the Academy. "We represent the Academy," said one

student, "so we have to do well. It's tough sometimes." In a variety of ways, students were willing to pitch in to make the Academy a success. At the Media Academy, for instance, students answered phones or straightened up the Academy office. When deadlines were near, students came in early and stayed late to make sure the paper went out on time.

Academic Performance

Indications of improved academic performance for Academy students were found in their completion of assignments, improved grades, increased self-esteem, and improved attendance.

At the Media Academy, only seven students from the initial cohort failed to graduate. Of these, two got married and left school to work; the others left because of a variety of personal and family-related problems. As ninth graders, all but one Health Academy student scored below the 50th percentile in both English and math on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). But by the time they were graduating seniors, 24 of 32 (75 percent) of them were accepted at four-year colleges; 13 of these met the entrance requirements for universities in the California system. Table 1 compares CTBS scores for the three cohorts to the schools' and district's scores for the school year 1986-87. In all three areas, reading, language arts, and mathematics, academy students scored better than others in their respective schools and the district.

Average CTBS Scores for Academy, School, and District Students
1986-1987 School Year

Subtest	Media Academy	Fremont H.S.	Health Academy*	Health Academy**	Oak. Tech. H.S.	District
Reading	42	25	53	51	30	33
Language Arts	49	26	49	55	37	37
Mathematics	54	41	54	62	53	51

TABLE 1

* 1985 cohort
** 1986 cohort

Over half the Health and Media Academy students reported their grades had improved after joining the program. Between sophomore and senior years, 63 percent of students graduating in 1989 had an improved grade point average (GPA). Of these, 10 improved a full grade or more. Many who entered the academy with a D or low-C average graduated with As, Bs, and Cs on their transcripts. While the aggregate GPA for each of the three cohorts didn't show much change between sophomore and seniors years (from a low C to a high C average), the 10 students entering with the lowest GPAs for each cohort made remarkable progress. As sophomores, they had low D or F averages, but by the time they were seniors, they had raised their GPAs to a high D or low C. Based on what we know about at-risk students, it is likely that these 10 students would have dropped out had they not received the personal and focused attention of the academies. In fact, one student who raised his average from D minus to C admitted that he would have left school had it not been for the Health Academy.

It should be noted that the Academy curriculum was more demanding than what students would have taken had they not enrolled in the program. Students took more advanced courses and reported Academy courses in general were more challenging than their non-Academy classes. Transcripts showed, for example, that in the Health Academy, the chemistry and geometry classes brought down the GPAs of many students. In both Academies, however, more than half attended summer school in order to bring their grades back up.

Students attributed their improved grades to the additional support they received from teachers or pointed to the teamwork and cooperative arrangements in classes. Some students, however, reflecting on their personal development, drew a connection between their growing self-confidence and better schoolwork. This notion was echoed by an English teacher at Oakland Tech: "They're much more willing to tackle things and give it a try. They're less afraid to make mistakes I

think they're a lot more mentally healthy than the average group of seniors that I would see."

Academy students completed their homework and submitted it on time. According to the physiology teacher, Health Academy students might not have been "academic whizzes," but they could always be relied upon to turn in their assignments. "The proof is in the gradebook," he said, pointing to pages filled with grades and checks for completed work.

Attendance was a serious problem at both high schools, but not within the Academies. In fact, as the director of the Health Academy pointed out, the number of students who came to school on a given day was often greater in the Academy courses--despite a smaller initial enrollment. In non-Academy classes, it was not unusual for only 12 of 35 students to show up, while all 20 Academy students would attend their class.

A key element in students' better academic performance was their improved self-esteem that accompanied participation in the program. In fact, membership in the Academy itself was a source of pride. There was clearly something special about being part of the program. In addition, more challenging classes and teachers' higher expectations had a tendency to make students feel better about their accomplishments. Finally, the support students received from teachers and peers helped to reduce fear of failure. As their teachers pointed out, Academy students were not afraid to speak up in class or take a chance.

Social Bonding

The Academies gave students and teachers a chance to get to know each other well and to develop a sense of group membership. Several students spoke of the close-knit, family-like atmosphere which brought them closer to teachers and fellow Academy students. In describing the Media Academy, for example, one student remarked that "you feel as comfortable here as you do at home when there are

several people cooking in a small kitchen." Another said he liked the teachers because they "don't have an image of being God." "It's nice being here," said another, "I sometimes wonder what I'd be doing if I were not here."

The Media Academy director summed up the success of the program with these words: "We're not doing anything radical educationally. What makes it work is that there are a few teachers that know all the kids real well, and the kids know each other real well." Many students, in fact, credited the Academy for their continued enrollment in school. As one student put it, "The bond between students, parents, teachers, and the principal kept me from being a dropout. I am so different from the way I was before."

Friendships among the Academy students were common, and many reported that most of their friends were Academy members. While the cohort scheduling contributed to their choice of friends, they said, working in groups and similarity of interests also influenced their choice of friends. In contrast, their friendships outside of the Academy were primarily social.

The seniors described their Academy friends as more serious than non-Academy students: caring, active, smart, ambitious, motivated, and intellectual. Study groups, however, did not appear to be common; nearly all students said they studied alone and seldom with friends.

Future Orientation

Whereas earlier versions of Academies were designed to equip students for entry-level jobs, Oakland's Health and Media Academies emphasize preparation for postsecondary education. In these programs, students have been encouraged to look beyond a particular course, the current semester, or their high school diploma to the possibility of college and a career. Thus, students who otherwise might have finished high school with limited skills, or who were contemplating leaving school altogether, developed a more positive outlook on the future. With a growing confidence in their

own abilities, more clearly defined goals, and a better idea of what it takes to succeed, students began to plan seriously for college.

The particular vocational focus of the Academies attracted some students to the program in the first place. Several joined for the very reason that they were interested in becoming doctors, journalists, or veterinarians. The confidence, resources, and support they gained from the Academy helped ensure their achievement of those goals. A Health Academy teacher noted, "I think a lot of them are getting into college that might not have . . . . Some of them would have anyway, but I think we've got a few more that would not have automatically, or would not have even thought about college."

Virtually every student interviewed had college plans. Of the 16 Health Academy seniors, 15 had applied to college and planned to attend. The one exception had decided to join the military first to gain additional experience. Of the 28 students at the Media Academy, 25 had applied to college. The other three wanted to work for a year or so before making up their minds. Academy students were accepted at many of the University of California and California State University campuses, as well as several other local and out-of-state universities. Fifty-eight percent of the 1989 graduating Health Academy seniors took either the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the Academic College Test (ACT) compared to only 32 percent of the school and 40 percent of the district seniors. About 14 percent of all academy students (both Health and Media) took the SAT more than once. In some cases, students took it three times; one student took it five times.

About half of the students indicated that they were going to attend a junior college before transferring to a four-year institution, even though several already had been accepted. They felt their current skills weren't quite strong enough for survival in the university and that a junior college would ease the transition. These students seemed able to assess their skills and limitations objectively and realistically; others

were confident enough not to let any supposed weaknesses discourage them. When asked about her career plans, one girl replied, "If I'm going to be a nurse, why not a doctor?"

Academy students also learned the importance of planning. They learned that if they planned early and made the right preparations, they could successfully attain their goals. A Health Academy senior, for example, was interested in pursuing a career in physical therapy. A self-described potential dropout before joining the Academy, he researched schools that would best serve his interest. Once he found a university he felt would provide him with the best opportunities, he contacted the dean of the School of Physical Therapy to ensure that he could meet all the requirements.

All the seniors who were interviewed said they would recommend the Academy to another student, and an important reason for this appeared to have been the emphasis the Academies placed on preparation for the future. As one student put it, the Academy "will help you find a direction in life." More specifically, students said that the Academies taught them about career options (30 percent), improved their skills (23 percent), and provided them with alternatives in life (14 percent).

Discussion

What was it about the Academies that might have contributed to these changes in behavior and attitudes toward school? When we asked the Academy students to explain, more than half pointed to the caring and supportive teachers; others felt the companionship and teamwork with classmates was a factor. In fact, our observations and interviews with adults provided evidence for both these explanations, as we will attempt to demonstrate in this section. We will expand on these hypotheses and attempt to identify those features of the Academies that had an impact on the students and their school performance.

We use as a springboard for the discussion, the theory of dropout prevention presented earlier (Wehlage et al., 1989). According to this theory, effective school programs must foster both "school membership" and "educational engagement." School membership refers to a type of social bonding to the school, a sense of belonging. Several aspects of the Academies help to build such a feeling of companionship. At the Media Academy, for example, students learn about the teamwork and cooperation required in putting together a newspaper. They learn about the division of labor, coordination, and teamwork required in writing articles, resolving conflicts, and meeting deadlines. At the Health Academy, group work is also an integral part of the students' experience. In the computer class, for example, some classroom activities simulate actual work experiences, such as when student teams were responsible for a single product, with one student acting as "supervisor." These and other experiences led students to see themselves as Health Academy or Media Academy members.

Educational engagement is achieved when students develop a habit of being involved in their classes and the curriculum of study. They are genuinely interested in learning and knowing more about their lessons. In the Academies, the focus of the curriculum on a specific professional or vocational area adds relevance to classroom study. In addition, the connections with businesses and community agencies, and work and field experiences, expose students to the real world of medicine or newspaper production. At the Health Academy, students attend lectures on health-related topics at the nursing college nearby; Media Academy students help produce a bilingual community newspaper as well as the Green and Gold.

With this theory as a guide, we have identified five key elements of the Academies that seemed to contribute most to the development of educational engagement and school membership: (1) a relevant and challenging curriculum, (2) work exposure and experience, (3) field trips and special events, (4) support services

and resources, and (5) restructured schooling. In the discussion, we point out ways in which certain features support the theory of dropout prevention.

A Relevant and Challenging Curriculum

A fundamental principle of the Academy model is to provide students with a relevant and challenging curriculum. Whatever the particular focus, courses are designed to emphasize a common vocational or career theme. In their interviews, students in both the Health and Media Academies said they were able to see a purpose to the courses and were seldom bored. They confirmed that their Academy courses had connections to one another and to the real world.

One way the Academies accomplish this is through the hands-on application of what students learn in Academy lessons. For example, because the Health Academy science classes were followed by a laboratory period, students had a chance to practice the skills taught in the previous hour. Similarly, at the Media Academy, students were often able to apply their journalism skills in other courses. In an assignment for their English class, for instance, students wrote a news story about the death of Julius Caesar.

The director of the Media Academy stressed the importance of a relevant and interesting curriculum in improving attendance. If the students are excited about what they are learning and see the relationship between it and their everyday and future lives, they will come to class. "If there's one subject that will draw students into the school and keep them there everyday, then you have a chance the other five periods of the day." A few students, in fact, admitted that on days when they felt "tired of school," they would attend only the Academy classes.

Most students felt the Academy classes were more difficult than those in the regular program. Nearly two-thirds of the Health Academy students and half of those from the Media Academy agreed that Academy classes required more work. Because teachers demanded more, the students said, they were more challenged, and thus

worked harder. Some Academy students even believed that the more challenging classes were easier to pass. Their explanation for this apparent paradox was that because the classes were more interesting and the Academy teachers more supportive, the students were motivated to work harder.

The potential benefit of the increased effort was not lost on the students. As one girl put it, in the Media Academy, "you feel better about yourself . . . you feel you've earned the grade." In other classes, she continued, work was "thrown at you" and the classes "just aren't a challenge, with just book, paper, and pencil. It can get boring; there's no learning." You could get a grade simply for attendance.

In the Academies, peer pressure against school success, as is often found among inner-city students, was rare. The physiology teacher at the Health Academy, for example, commented on how the Academy students "really want to know and are quite a bit more motivated and less alienated." In the Academy, "it's really okay to want to do well in school." In non-Academy classes, on the other hand, "it's okay to give *smart* answers to the teachers, but it's not okay to have As." Many students made similar observations. One student said she and her Health Academy classmates were considered "bookworms" by their friends, but that she didn't mind. Another said she preferred the Academy classes because students in the others were "half asleep" and "don't worry about school."

Work Exposure and Experience

Through experiential learning, the Academies strengthen the connections of the curriculum with the real world. Field trips, internships, mentoring, and the like give students the opportunity to see what working in the field of medicine or journalism is really like.

In a variety of ways, the Academies make it possible for students to interact with professionals in their fields of interest. Health Academy students, for example, participated in a wide range of seminars, tours, and other activities. Several nearby

hospitals, medical facilities, and the Samuel Merritt College of Nursing provided opportunities for students to visit classes, attend lectures, and shadow professionals. In 1987-88, for example, the local Red Cross chapter provided students with 16 hours of instruction about AIDS and then trained them to instruct their peers at Oakland Tech and other schools on the same material.

Another interesting example was the 12-week class in Health Occupations. In the first semester, students learned the basic skills used by hospital clerical workers, nurses' aides, and x-ray technicians. In the second semester, the teacher arranged for the students to work 12 weeks at Kaiser hospital, about three blocks from the school. The students rotated through 12 different departments or areas (e.g., pediatrics, admitting, and medical lab) and, based on their work performance, some were offered summer jobs at $9.00 an hour. The maturity and workplace behavior of the Health Academy students prompted the hospital administrator to request more student workers. He even commented on how they had set a good example for the other employees.

In addition to seminars and simulated work experiences, Health Academy students sometimes "shadowed" medical professionals, observing and asking questions about what their "subject" actually did during the course of a day. Such experiences fleshed out the image students had of particular careers, a process that led some to change their minds altogether. For example, one student thought he wanted to be an anesthesiologist. After having spent some time with one at Kaiser Hospital, however, the student switched to sports medicine.

At the Media Academy, periodic visitors from local newspapers or television gave seminars and other presentations. Media Academy students also toured and met with the staff of organizations like the Oakland Tribune. Guest speakers not only provided students with additional information about career options, but also provided students with role models. A reporter from the Oakland Tribune, for

example, led a discussion on tracking down leads and developing a story. Many of the professionals had experiences to which students could relate. They told the students, "I made it, and you can too."

Field trips and special events play an important part in developing school membership and educational engagement. An important event each year in the Media Academy, for instance, is the three-day field trip to Yosemite National Park. In 1989, 45 students and five adults made the journey. For many of the inner-city students, this excursion represented their first experience in the mountains; some had never left Oakland before. To O'Donoghue, however, the field trip was more than just a chance to expose his students to the natural world; he structured the three days around a variety of journalism activities. After a hike, for example, students wrote up descriptions and then critiqued each others' work. This past year, in addition to the four school faculty members who went along, a practicing free-lance journalist accompanied the students. He not only provided them with guidance and feedback on their stories, but gave them insights into the life of a professional reporter.

In June, the Media Academy held its annual "Academy Awards Dinner" at a local hotel. The principal, school board members, Academy teachers, students, and their parents attended the event, where the program included an invited speaker, a local T.V. anchor, and media and community dignitaries. The three key teachers gave students various awards for achievement and as incentives to work harder in the coming year. The testimonials from the graduating seniors were genuinely touching and confirmed the importance of knowing that "someone cares." This experience and others helped to rekindle the researchers' faith in the power of education to transform lives and communities.

Support Services and Resources

The Academies also provide students with extensive support in the area of college counseling and planning. A non-Academy English teacher commented that he was pleasantly surprised by the way the Health Academy students were "very aggressive about seeking me out and asking me about scholarships, turning in applications." In his judgment, while the Academy students might not have the best GPAs in the school, as a group they were better prepared for college.

College applications are made available, and counselors and teachers helped students fill out forms and answer questions. At times, students are brought to nearby colleges to attend a class and talk to college students. For example, when Health Academy students went to a biology class at the University of California at Berkeley, they talked to biology majors and learned about what it takes to be accepted by the university and how to stay in. In addition, job listings, workplace contacts, and career options are discussed; and students are taught how to write resumes and behave during job interviews.

Through such first-hand experiences, students learned how education applies to the world of work. They learned the requirements for college entrance and the demands of a career in medicine or the media. At the same time, they are shown the significance of school through a variety of "non-book" experiences. As a result, they feel more confident, assured that they can confront and handle difficulties that might arise in the future.

Restructured Schooling

The two Academies represent bold efforts to restructure the schooling experiences for truly disadvantaged youth. In both their design and implementation, the programs incorporate the latest thinking and knowledge on preventing students from dropping out. Research and practical experience, for example, have led to a set

of strategies that schools can use to develop school membership and educational engagement (L. F. Guthrie, Long, & G. P. Guthrie, 1989).

For one thing, the Academies involve businesses and the surrounding larger communities in sponsorship, mentoring, tutoring, seminars, field trips, work experience, and other activities. The natural connection between the particular vocational focus of each Academy and the community and business agencies has made establishing partnerships easier. The Academies acknowledge that schools alone cannot meet the needs of at-risk youth.

Perhaps more importantly, business and community are involved in substantive ways. All too often, business contributions are limited to short-term, superficial kinds of activities. In the academies, however, the involvement is on-going and real. Advisory Panels play an active role in planning, developing, and guiding the programs. They also represent the Academies to the district, often arguing for added support. The relationship between the Health Academy and the Merritt College of Nursing has grown increasingly close. Building upon a joint project funded by the California Postsecondary Education Commission, these two institutions have collaborated on several other shared ventures.

The Academies are structured to provide students with a more personalized experience, an alternative to the anonymity and regimentation of most schools. Classes are kept small, and as school-within-a-school programs, the Academies enroll fewer than 150 students at a time and are block-scheduled through Academy classes. This creates a family-like atmosphere and enables students and teachers to get to know each other better, thus minimizing the impersonal atmosphere of the typical urban high school. On at least one occasion, the Health Academy director took several students to her home and helped them type up their college applications. Such personal attention made an indelible impression on the students.

Because of the block-scheduling, students take most of their classes together and really get to know their instructors and their classmates well. The instructional day isn't always cut cleanly into 50-minute segments either. Laboratories are linked with content classes, journalism merged with English, and field trips provide opportunities for experiential learning outside the school. Block-scheduling also seems to facilitate academic performance in that lessons are connected thematically. As one student put it, "you can use all the information learned from all four classes to do your homework, which really helps." It also fosters continuity in the curriculum. As the Media Academy director explained, "Learning is not necessarily divided up in peoples' minds and in life."

Conclusion

The majority of students served by the two Academies came from communities populated by the "truly disadvantaged," where poverty and crime were common. In this context, getting a good education is often impossible. In fact, educating inner-city youth stands as perhaps the greatest challenge facing today's educators:

> The development of cognitive, linguistic, and other educational and job-related skills necessary for the world of work in the mainstream economy is . . . adversely affected . . . Teachers become frustrated and do not teach, and children do not learn. A vicious cycle is perpetuated through the family, the community, and through the schools. (Wilson, 1987, p. 57)

High school academies like those in Oakland may be the key to breaking the vicious cycle. Even though the two Academies in the Oakland Unified School District are not without problems in actual implementation, and even though the Academies did not succeed fully in graduating all their students, both the Media and the Health Academies, nevertheless, have accomplished the nearly impossible with a significant number of urban at-risk youth. The interviews conducted with the graduating class in both Academies revealed a group of confident, interested, and ambitious young adults.

In the Academies, students are neither patronized nor treated as buddies. Instead, the faculty, and especially the directors of the programs, treat their students as mature, responsible adults. They show genuine concern over students' development as a whole; they never lower standards or strike bargains (Sedlak et al., 1986). Despite the time commitments of being an "educational entrepreneur," whose creativity and hard work garnered crucial financial and technical assistance from local businesses and the community, the directors are, in the words of at least one student, "always there" for them.

Many of the Academy students came from broken homes and an inner-city environment in which few people and few things gave them positive messages about themselves. Moreover, in more typical inner-city high schools, less successful students lead lives of anonymity, where no teacher knows them really well (Sedlak et al., 1986). The Academies, however, help these students develop an identity and expose them to the larger world beyond the "mean streets" of East Oakland. Frequent contacts with researchers, observers, and other visitors complement the family-like relationships with their teachers, mentors, and fellow Academy students. These potential role models, unlike the adults in the students' home neighborhood, respected the students, and thus affirmed their own self-worth.

In many urban high schools, peer pressure against academic success has a strong influence on minority students (Fordham 1988; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 1974, 1978). In fact, the peer pressure for academic non-involvement and non-conformity is often given as a reason for unusually high dropout rates and academic failure. In the Academies, on the other hand, success in school is respected; and an orientation toward college, almost universal. As one teacher pointed out, the Health Academy students didn't have the "don't be a nerd" pressure, while for other non-Academy students, including those who were "much more academically trained," giving *smart* answers was okay, but getting good grades was not.

While other students may have drifted toward academic non-engagement for fear of being perceived as "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), the Academy students had pride and a sense of ownership in their program. To uphold the reputation of the Academy in the presence of the researchers, they even admonished each other to pay attention or to do better in class.

The experiences and changed attitudes of the Health and Media Academy students show that it is never too late to provide effective interventions for at-risk youth. Even though most of these students have succeeded against all odds in being admitted to the universities, many will continue to need restructured schooling at the college level. We are encouraged to know the Academy graduates may benefit from visionary programs such as the Summer Bridge and the Intensive Learning Experience programs established by the California State University system to serve incoming, underrepresented, and underprepared minority students (L. F. Guthrie & G. P. Guthrie, 1988). Like the Academies, these programs strive to foster social bonding and academic engagement for at-risk freshmen. The physiology teacher at the Health Academy summed up the program best:

> The Academy has two purposes. The first is about taking some specific students and really trying to give them the ability to get along with the school and the skills and courses that it will take to get them to do something they wouldn't otherwise have gotten to do, whether to go to college or go to a training program. On another level, the goal is to show . . . what it takes to get students, like minority students in Oakland, to really respond to school, [and] to really think about what it takes. It takes some connection to careers. It takes some enrichment so that school isn't so dull. It takes some extra tutoring. It takes really pushing on these kids in the sense that they are special, and they can do it. It takes smaller classes so teachers can really get to know them. This is the kind of thing we ought to be doing if we're serious about wanting students like Tech students to feel themselves to be productive in society and not be on the margins.

Schools **can** make a difference in the lives of disadvantaged urban youth and break the cycle, if only educators dare to be creative in designing and adapting programs to meet their needs. As Ralph Tyler (1979) pointed out:

What we have found out in the last ten years is that effective learning programs for most children can be constructed . . . . The limitations, if any, are not in the children, but in our lack of inventiveness in using what we already know about human learning.

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